

The Laws of Duplicate Bridge, 2017

The new version of the Laws contains many changes, almost all designed to clarify rather than innovate.

This commentary highlights the changes, but focuses mainly on refreshing your knowledge of what to do when something goes wrong.

Laws 1-16 cover general aspects of the mechanics of the game.

1: The Pack.

This now states that the backs of the cards must be identical, and with a symmetrical design. A Regulating Authority may insist that the faces of the cards must also be symmetrical, but the SBU has not taken up this option – cards with the symmetrical design are more expensive.

7: Control of Boards and Cards.

“When a board is to be played it is placed in the centre of the table **where it shall remain, correctly oriented**, until play is completed.”

(A correctly oriented board prevents players from returning their cards to the wrong slots, thus spoiling the tournament. It is acceptable to move the board slightly to accommodate dummy, but without altering the orientation. The board should be fully visible throughout the play.)

9: Procedure Following an Irregularity.

Now clearly states that any player, including dummy, may try to prevent an irregularity. But dummy may not draw attention to an irregularity that has already occurred until play is over.

(Dummy may try to stop declarer leading from the wrong hand, but once a card is nominated, or played, dummy should not point out that the lead is in the other hand.)

11: Forfeiture of the Right to Rectification.

“The right to rectification of an irregularity may be forfeited if either member of the non-offending side takes any action before summoning the Director. **If a side has gained through subsequent action taken by an opponent in ignorance of the relevant provisions of the law, the Director adjusts only that side’s score by taking away any accrued advantage. The other side retains the score achieved at the table.**”

(So no matter how well you think you know the Laws...call the Director immediately!)

12: Director’s Discretionary Powers.

This is quite a technical law that defines when and how the TD should award an adjusted score. New emphasis is put on the objectives of score adjustment. The aim is not to punish the offender, but:

“to recover as nearly as possible the probable outcome of the board had the infraction not occurred.”

(Do not expect to benefit from an infraction committed by your opponents. The Director adjusts your score only if you have been damaged. Note that there is no adjustment

*“if, subsequent to the irregularity, the non-offending side has contributed to its own damage by **an extremely serious error** [unrelated to the infraction] or **by a gambling action, which if unsuccessful it might have hoped to recover through rectification.**”)*

13-15: Deal with the situations where a player has the wrong number of cards, or when a table has started to play a wrong board, or someone has somehow taken a hand from a different board. **The TD should not automatically cancel the board, but make every effort to allow it to be played.**

(Always count your cards before looking at your hand and before returning it to the correct slot at the end of play. Always check that you have the correct boards and the correct opponents. Be Kind to the TD.)

16: Authorized and Unauthorized Information.

This is a big one. Section A covers sources of information that you are entitled to make use of. Section B has been re-written:

16B: Extraneous Information from Partner.

“Any extraneous information from partner that might suggest a call or play is unauthorized. This includes remarks, questions, replies to questions, unexpected alerts or failures to alert, unmistakable hesitation, unwonted speed, special emphasis, tone, gesture, movement or mannerism.

- (a) A player may not choose a call or play that is demonstrably suggested over another by unauthorized information if the other call or play is a logical alternative.
- (b) A logical alternative is an action that a significant proportion of the class of players in question, using the methods of the partnership, would seriously consider, and some might select.”

(When partner misexplains your bid, alerts unnecessarily, or hesitates before making a call or play, you may have a dilemma. If you consider a later call or play to be automatic you should make it. Your opponents may disagree – and the TD is there to arbitrate. Remember that if he rules against you it is a difference of judgment, not an attack on your ethics. There is nothing personal in the TD’s decision, accept it graciously.

If you have a choice of call or play you should try not to choose the one more likely to create a favourable outcome for your side. If you are unsure, do your ethical best, then, if you feel uncomfortable, take advice and ask the TD to rule.

Note that this does not endorse the widely-held belief that whenever partner hesitates you must Pass. If Pass is not a logical alternative you should make a call.)

16C covers information from withdrawn calls or plays, and 16D deals with **Extraneous Information from Other Sources.**

“When a player accidentally receives extraneous information about a board he is playing or has yet to play, as by looking at the wrong hand; by overhearing calls, results or remarks; by seeing cards at another table; or by seeing a card belonging to another player at his own table before the auction begins the Director should be notified forthwith, preferably by the recipient of the information.”

The Director will try to allow the board to be played, but if it is clear that the result may be affected by extraneous information he will award an adjusted score.

(Even if there is a playing Director you should tell someone that you have potentially compromising information – no need to be specific. This protects you from accusations that your actions have been influenced by information you should not have.

It is always upsetting when a board cannot be played because of a careless remark. Make every effort not to discuss deals when other players who have not yet played the board might overhear.)

Laws 17-40 cover the Auction Period.

17: The Auction Period.

The End of Auction Period is redefined – it ends when a defender faces the opening lead. The period after the final call is designated the Clarification Period.

20: Review and Explanation of Calls.

Covers when a player may ask for a review or explanation, also what to do if you realise that you have misexplained a call, or forgotten to alert.

(If you realise during the auction that you have given a mistaken explanation you should call the Director, and correct your error during the Clarification Period.

If partner has given what you consider to be a wrong explanation, or failed to alert, or alerted wrongly you should say and do nothing during the auction. If you become declarer or dummy you should point out the error during the Clarification Period; if you are a defender wait till the end of play.)

20G: Incorrect Procedure.

“A player may not ask a question if his sole purpose is to benefit partner.

A player may not ask a question if his sole purpose is to elicit an incorrect response from an opponent.”

23: Comparable Call

This is quite new, and may cause some debate before it settles down.

“A call that replaces a withdrawn call is a comparable call, if it:

1. has the same or similar meaning as that attributable to the withdrawn call, or
2. defines a subset of the possible meanings attributable to the withdrawn call, or
3. has the same purpose (e.g. an asking bid or a relay) as that attributable to the withdrawn call.”

When a call is cancelled and the offender chooses at his proper turn to replace the irregularity with a comparable call, then both the auction and play continue without further rectification.”

(This refers to errors such as bids out of turn and insufficient bids.

Eg: partner opens 1NT and you bid 2♦, transfer to hearts. But RHO has overcalled 2♠. Call the TD before attempting to correct your error! You may replace your 2♦ call with 3♥ – or, if playing Rubensohl transfers, 3♦. Provided no substantial extra information is conveyed by the change of call the auction proceeds normally. There will be more debate about 23.2 You may replace a withdrawn call with any call that does not add new information. Say you Pass out of turn. The auction reverts to partner, who opens 1♠. You may respond 1NT, or 2♠ – neither call adds to the meaning of your withdrawn call.)

24: Card Exposed or Led During the Auction.

If your partner is able to see a card in your hand that card is placed face up for the duration of the auction, and the other side may take advantage of knowledge gained.

“If it is a single card of honour rank or is any card prematurely led, offender’s partner must pass when next it is his turn to call....If two or more cards are so exposed offender’s partner must pass when next it is his turn to call.”

At the end of the auction the card(s) is returned to declarer or dummy’s hand; it remains as a faced penalty card if it belongs to a defender.

25: Legal and Illegal Changes of Call.

“If a player discovers that he has not made the call he intended to make, he may, until his partner makes a call, substitute the call he intended for the unintended call. The second (intended) call stands and is subject to the appropriate Law, but the lead restrictions in Law 26 do not apply.

If the player’s original intent was to make the call selected or voiced, that call stands. **A change of call may be allowed because of a mechanical error or a slip of the tongue, but not because of a loss of concentration regarding the intent of the action.**

A player is allowed to replace an unintended call if the conditions described above are met, *no matter how he may have become aware of his error.*

No substitution of call may be made when his partner has made a subsequent call.”

26: Call Withdrawn, Lead Restrictions.

A late change here has meant that the published SBU version contains an error. If a withdrawn call is replaced by a comparable call there are no restrictions. If not, Section B applies.

B. Lead Restrictions

“When an offending player’s call is withdrawn and it is not replaced by a comparable call, then if he becomes a defender declarer may, at the offender’s partner’s first turn to lead (which may be the opening lead) prohibit offender’s partner from leading any (one) suit which has not been specified in the **legal** auction by the offender. Such prohibition continues for as long as the offender’s partner retains the lead.”

(The published paragraph B1 is deleted.)

27: Insufficient Bid

Slightly modified to incorporate the concept of the comparable call.

30: Pass Out of Rotation

"When a pass out of rotation is made at offender's RHO's turn to call, the offender must pass when next it is his turn to call.

If the pass is made at partner's or LHO's turn to call, and the offender has not previously called, then:

Offender's partner may make any legal call at his proper turn, (Law 16C2 applies).

Offender may make any legal call at his correct turn... When the call is a comparable call there is no further rectification. When the call is not a comparable call offender's partner must pass when next it is his turn to call.

If the offender has previously called, a pass out of rotation at offender's LHO's turn to call is treated as a change of call."

31-32 deal similarly with Bids, Doubles and Redoubles Out of Rotation.

(Note that you can always simplify things by accepting the call out of turn!)

33-39 cover all sorts of inadmissible calls, which hopefully you will not make, but which the TD will sort out if necessary.

40: Partnership Understandings

Another big one. It deals with systemic agreements, which must be made available to opponents.

*(The SBU requires both members of a partnership to carry Convention Cards, which opponents may consult before the start of play, at their turn to call or play, and during the Clarification Period. Questions may be asked at your turn to call or play, and during the Clarification period, and players should answer as clearly and fully as they can. You should explain your agreements, but **not** offer your interpretation of a call that is undiscussed.)*

Laws 41-71 cover the Play Period.

41: Commencement of Play

No change here: play commences when the opening lead is faced. You may ask for a review of the auction at your first turn to play; later you may be informed what the contract is, and whether, but not by whom, it was doubled.

42-43: Dummy's Rights / Limitations

Dummy should keep track of tricks won and lost, and may try to prevent an irregularity; as by reminding declarer which hand is on lead; or asking whether he has failed to follow suit. Otherwise he takes no part in the play. He may not look at another player's cards, and may not draw attention to an irregularity until play is over. If dummy violates these restrictions his side may lose the right to rectification for damage caused.

45: Card Played

If a defender holds a card so that partner can see its face that card is deemed to be played to the current trick. Similarly, if declarer holds a card face up, touching or nearly touching the table, or the card appears to be played, it is a played card.

If declarer mistakenly calls a card from dummy he may change the card provided he has not subsequently played another card from his own hand or dummy. ***This applies only to slips of the tongue, not loss of concentration, or rethinks.*** Any cards subsequently played by defenders can be changed without penalty.

If dummy plays a card declarer did not nominate it must be changed unless the error is not noticed till both sides have played to the next trick. Cards subsequently played may be replaced without penalty.

46: Incomplete or Invalid Designation of a Card from Dummy

Describes what happens if declarer does not designate a card accurately.

Best to follow correct procedure and name both suit and rank!

47: Retraction of Card Played

Covers the very rare situations where you may change a card you have played. In particular, if you are wrongly told by an opponent that it is your turn to play you may retract a played card without penalty.

48-52: Penalty Cards

Declarer cannot have a penalty card.

A minor penalty card is very rare: a card below honour rank exposed by accident, not design. It is not played, it falls from your hand, or attaches itself to the card you meant to play. A minor penalty card must be played at the first legal opportunity unless you have an honour that you can follow suit with. Major penalty cards are cards exposed or played by design, or honour cards accidentally exposed. A Major penalty card must be played at the first legal opportunity.

If you gain the lead while your partner has a penalty card you should not play until declarer has exercised one of his options. Declarer may require or prohibit a lead of the suit of the penalty card, when the card is picked up and need no longer be played at the first legal opportunity; or leave it as a penalty card and allow you to choose a lead.

"Information derived from a penalty card and the requirements for playing that penalty card are authorized for all players for as long as the penalty card remains on the table"

53-56: Lead Out of Turn

Any lead out of turn may be accepted by the other side. Otherwise a defender's card becomes a Major penalty card: declarer / dummy's card is returned to hand.

A faced opening lead out of turn gives declarer the option of accepting the lead – he may choose to be declarer or dummy – or refusing the lead, in which case the card led becomes a penalty card as above.

57-60: Various Illegal Plays

If you play prematurely, or simultaneously, or cannot comply with declarer's demands, this is where to look. *Best just to lead and follow suit in turn!*

61-64: Revokes

Law 61 defines who may ask about a possible revoke: the active players (declarer or either defender) may ask each other whether they have a card they should have played; dummy may ask declarer only.

Law 62 explains how a revoke must be corrected if it is noticed before it becomes established.

Law 63 explains how a revoke becomes established. It may no longer be corrected.

Law 64 covers the trick adjustment once a revoke is established. If the trick on which the revoke occurred was won by the offending player it is transferred to the other side at the end of play. One trick is also transferred after an established revoke, but there are various provisos: the revoking side must win a subsequent trick; dummy cannot revoke; the revoke must have occurred before trick 12,

Check the Laws before taking action!

65: Arrangement of Tricks

Place the cards from quitted tricks in order, correctly oriented, until the score is agreed.

66: Inspection of Tricks

Remember that you cannot ask to see the cards from the last trick once you have turned over your own.

67: Defective Trick

One to avoid!

Play your cards correctly so that everybody can see them; do not turn them over till all four cards are clearly visible to all.

68-71: Claim or Concession

A claim is a statement by declarer or either defender that his side will win a specific number of the remaining tricks; a concession is a statement that his side will lose a specified number of tricks.

If a defender concedes his partner may immediately object, in which case the TD is summoned and play continues. Cards shown are not penalty cards as such, but may constitute unauthorised information.

"A claim should be accompanied at once by a clear statement of the line of play or defence through which the claimer proposes to win the tricks claimed, including the order in which the cards will be played. The player making the claim or concession faces his hand."

After a claim / concession play is suspended, *but the Laws now allow play to continue* at the request of the non-claiming side provided all four players agree. The result obtained at the end of play stands.

A sponsoring organisation establishes a Correction Period during which agreement to a claim / concession may be withdrawn: if a side has claimed / conceded a trick it has in fact lost / won the score is corrected.

If a claim / concession is disputed the TD should be called. He will follow Law 70 in adjudicating.

Note that you should not accept the concession of a trick that your side cannot win.

Laws 72-75 cover Bridge Ethics. No major changes, but worth study so as to avoid falling in to bad habits.

72: General Principles

A player must not **intentionally** commit an infraction; he need not draw attention to an infraction committed by his own side, but should never deliberately conceal one.

73 Communication, Tempo and Deception

A Communication between partners ...shall be effected only by means of calls and plays...made without undue emphasis, mannerism or inflection, and without undue hesitation or haste.

B Partners shall not communicate by means such as the manner in which calls or plays are made, extraneous remarks or gestures, questions asked or not asked, or alerts and explanations given or not given.

The gravest possible offence is ... to exchange information through pre-arranged methods of communication not sanctioned by these Laws.

C Player Receives Unauthorized Information from partner.

"...carefully avoid taking any advantage from that Unauthorized Information."

D Variations in Tempo or Manner.

It is desirable ...for players to maintain steady tempo and unvarying manner... Players should be particularly careful when variations may work to the benefit of their side... ***Unintentionally to vary the tempo in which a call or play is made is not an infraction.*** Inferences from such variation are authorized only to opponents, who may act upon the information ***at their own risk.***

A player may not attempt to mislead an opponent by means of a question, remark or gesture; by the haste or hesitancy of a call or play (as in hesitating before playing a singleton); by the manner in which a call or play is made; or by any ***purposeful deviation from correct procedure.***

E. Deception. A player may appropriately attempt to deceive an opponent through a call or play (so long as the deception is not emphasized by unwonted haste or hesitancy, nor protected by concealed partnership understanding or experience).

If the Director determines that an innocent player has drawn a false inference from a question, remark, manner, tempo or the like, of an opponent ***who has no demonstrable bridge reason for the action, and who could have been aware,*** at the time of the action, that it could work to his benefit, the Director shall award an adjusted score.

It is acceptable to have a think when you have a problem. The fact that you have a problem is Unauthorized Information for partner. Opponents may draw inferences at their own risk but have no claim for damage unless you had nothing to think about, or partner has made use of the UI.

74 Conduct and Etiquette.

A. Proper Attitude

Emphasises the importance of courtesy and consideration for the sensibilities of others.

B. Etiquette

This Law has been unchanged for many years, and might appear a little old-fashioned. Basically it warns against any form of gamesmanship, such as: gratuitous comments; detaching a card before your turn to play; paying insufficient attention to the game; prolonging play unnecessarily (not claiming / conceding) for the purpose of disconcerting an opponent; and

summoning and addressing the Director in a manner discourteous to him or to other contestants.

C. Violations of Procedure

A motley set of taboos: using different designations for the same call; indicating approval or disapproval of a call or play; indicating the expectation or intention of winning a trick that is not yet completed; commenting or acting during the auction or play so as to call attention to a significant occurrence, or to the number of tricks still required for success; looking intently at another player or at another player's hand...for the purpose of seeing his cards or of observing the place from which he draws a card (it is appropriate to act on information acquired by accidentally seeing an opponent's card); showing an obvious lack of interest in a deal; varying the normal tempo of play for the purpose of disconcerting an opponent; leaving the table needlessly before the round is called.

75 Mistaken Explanation or Mistaken Call

A. Mistake Causing Unauthorized Information

Irrespective of whether or not an explanation is a correct statement of partnership agreement, a player, having heard his partner's explanation, knows that his own call has been misinterpreted. **This knowledge is unauthorized information** and the player must carefully avoid taking any advantage from it...

B Mistaken Explanation

When the partnership agreement is different from the explanation given, the explanation is an infraction of Law. **When this infraction results in damage to the non-offending side** the Director shall award an adjusted score

(Do not expect to profit from an opponent's error unless you are actually damaged!).

If you realise that you have made a wrong explanation you are advised to summon the Director before correcting it. If your partner has made a wrong explanation you should take no action till the auction is over. At the end of the auction, if you are declarer or dummy, you should correct the error before the opening lead is made; if you are a defender you must wait till the end of play.

C. Mistaken Call

When the partnership agreement has been explained correctly, the mistake being the call made and not the explanation, **there is no infraction**. The explanation must not be corrected immediately and there is no obligation to do so subsequently. Regardless of damage the result stands.

Note, however, that if partner's explanation reminds you that you have made a wrong bid that is unauthorized information. You must not take advantage of that knowledge – try to continue as if you had not heard it.

D. Director's Determination

Players are expected to disclose their partnership agreements accurately.

A partnership agreement requires that both players possess the same mutual understanding; **it is an infraction to describe an agreement where the same mutual understanding does not exist**.

When there has been an infraction ... the TD awards an adjusted score based on the likely outcome had the opponents received the correct explanation in a timely manner.

If it is unclear whether it is the bid or the explanation which is mistaken the TD will not give you the benefit of any doubt, but assume mistaken explanation.

Laws 76-93 cover Spectators, Scoring, the Role of the Director and Appeals. If you really want to know...

The Laws are published online at www.worldbridge.org under Regulations.

An A5 version produced by the SBU can be purchased from your District Secretary.

Cost £5, plus p&p if necessary.